

Protecting Land and Water

28th Annual Arizona Indian Town Hall
presented by First Nations Development Institute
hosted by
The Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs

Executive Summary

The Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs is proud to offer the Final Report of the 28th Annual Arizona Indian Town Hall presented by First Nations Development Institute (AITH). The purpose of this document is to report the findings of the 28th Annual Arizona Indian Town Hall hosted by the Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs (ACIA). This year's Town Hall title sponsor was the First Nations Development Institute (FNDI) and the ACIA could not have hosted this event without their support. Further, the partnership formed between ACIA and FNDI is a part of the mission of ACIA—to build partnerships to enhance intergovernmental relations, social and economic prosperity for the 22 Indian Tribes and Nations of Arizona. It is our sincere hope that this document contains practical and usable information for the State of Arizona, Tribes and Tribal leaders.

This annual event hosted by the ACIA was held on July 14-16th 2008, at the Carefree Resort in Carefree, AZ. The report of the AITH reflects the hard work of many participants, including elected and appointed public and tribal officials, policy advisors, community and business leaders, health and education leaders, gathered from throughout Arizona to discuss an especially important topic: *Protecting Land and Water*. The conversations were engaging, discussion was healthy, and in the end all participants contributed to this living document with their specific recommendations.

Conceptually, the idea of the town hall is easily traced back to what many call 'talking circles' in historic Native cultures. Indian nations and tribes often settled issues by discussion among their villages, clans, and elders until consensus was reached. Community values such as harmony, consensus and respect were and *are still* valued. Historically, many tribal leaders ruled by consent of the people and were held accountable. They consulted the people and could not make decisions without first discussing matters with tribal citizens; the will of the people was paramount.

Native traditions of discussion and consensus-building are the foundation upon which the AITH builds. Today, the AITH is more formal than the 'talking circle,' but still holds community values as primary. Structurally, the AITH borrows many of the methods of the Arizona Town Hall incorporating processes such as group panel discussions and a plenary session, where all participants work to develop a final report of recommendations.

The AITH Report is designed to be a snapshot of participants' perceptions and understanding of the issue under discussion, to provide recommendations for policy changes, and to address concerns that surfaced during the discussions. The AITH Report should also be deemed as a "report card" of state government in developing policies to ensure that both tribal and non-tribal governments learn about these programs and providing training to develop and implement these programs in their own communities.

This year's theme of the *Protecting Land and Water* was well received by Arizona's Indian country. The focus of the discussion during the AITH was to identify proactive steps communities can take to prepare for impending growth and how to protect tribal land and water. The following Executive summary is an overview of the information contained in the final report of the participants' two and half days of discussion.

The full document includes a summary of the findings, which identified certain common themes directed at tribal communities that can help provide communities the tools to sustain and grow their respective communities in the face of projected population growth and demand for natural resources; strength of our youth, creating partnerships, information management, community responsibility and opportunities to engage. One thing was clear, the recommendations that came out of these discussions, were recommendations that called upon tribal communities to take ultimate responsibility for the protection of their land and water. Few recommendations were for the state.

Summary and Findings

As previously stated, the theme of the 28th Annual AITH was *Protecting our Land and Water*. The focus was on identifying proactive solutions and recommendations for dealing with Arizona's projected growth over the next 50 years. Community planning groups such as the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) project that Arizona's population alone will grow from 6 million in 2005 to 16 million in 2050! What does this projected growth mean to Arizona's tribal community? This year's AITH sought to answer these and other vital questions related to the future growth of this great state.

The AITH was structured with daily keynote speakers and small working group discussions. After the general sessions, participants broke into one of four working groups facilitated by an expert/educator and recorded. Each group discussed the same four discussion questions created by the Content Planning Committee that advised ACIA. The facilitator kept the discussions focused and a recorder kept a written record of the data generated during the discussions. Each group discussed and was charged with discussing the following multipart discussion questions: 1) identifying and discussing the challenges and opportunities come with the projected growth and brainstorming proactive solutions for overcoming challenges and taking the opportunities; 2) identifying resources and assets that tribes have and can use to sustain and grow their communities; 3) identifying proactive steps to deal with projected growth; and 4) growing partnerships between peoples, groups, and agencies to foster consultation, collaboration and coordination. The raw data from these discussion sessions forms the basis of the full report and the recommendations contained within.

Participants in all groups identified certain common themes and ideas that could help provide communities the tools to sustain and grow their respective communities in the face of projected population growth and demand for natural resources, these themes include: the strength of our youth, creating partnerships, information management, community responsibility and opportunities to engage. Certainly, culture and cultural values in addition to land and natural resources were identified as strong assets that communities have that can help deal with projected statewide growth. Also, all groups identified the need for additional funding as a significant challenge for communities. However, the need for funding is a given and therefore participants were directed to go beyond the issue of funding and challenge themselves to what communities could do if money were not an issue. As one person stated, "just because I don't have money for gas, it doesn't mean I am not going to work; I just have to find another way to get there!" This analogy was presented to the discussion groups and they started thinking proactively about the issues at hand.

Overwhelmingly, Indian youth were identified as the greatest single asset or resource that tribal communities have in dealing with projected growth in the state. Participants stated that educating the youth in our cultural ways, cultural values and language was of paramount importance; stressing that this is the greatest resource available to tribes.

In order for tribes to sustain and grow their communities alongside of statewide growth over the next fifty years, discussants also agreed that information management was a key to successful management of growth in tribal communities. Information management is a broad category and encompasses everything from making more use of the internet and other technologies, to creating and information clearing house, to creating technical training for community members and leaders.

Each of the four groups of town hall participants identified community responsibility as an integral part of overall growth plans. There was a range of suggestions regarding community responsibility and most involved community participating in the process, as well. Some participants identified the need for new and revised tribal codes and policies and procedures. While others in the groups discussed the need for tribal governmental representation and participation in the political process with our own elected officials. Still other participants recommended the need for long range strategic planning and development of infrastructure.

Finally, participants agreed that tribes need to take advantage of opportunities and create opportunities to engage by partnering, consulting with, collaborating with and coordinating with other tribes, state agencies, federal agencies, non-profits and other private sector agencies. Most agreed that lack of communication and coordination was based on a variety of reasons, from lack of initiative or awareness or education on the part of the community or leaders of the community, to political shifts and changes in both the state and tribes to historic relationships that created a lack of trust. However, all agreed that in order to be “heard and be a part of the process” in dealing with growth, these reasons had to be set aside in order for tribes to be in control of their resources and growth.